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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001796

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV UZ

SUBJECT: JOURNALIST REPORTEDLY ATTACKED IN TASHKENT

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (U) The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the independent Uznews.net website both reported on October 12 that Sid Yanyshев, a Tashkent-based correspondent for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and the independent Ferghana.ru website, was attacked in Tashkent on October 11 by two men who allegedly identified themselves as National Security Service (NSS) officers.

¶2. (U) According to CPJ and Uznews, Yanyshев had just returned from Chirchiq, where he was covering protests over bread shortages and the rising cost of wheat. The two men reportedly approached him as he was returning home and then beat him and demanded that he quit reporting. He was not seriously injured. According to CPJ, Yanyshев was also summoned to the Tashkent Prosecutor's Office in Tashkent earlier this year as a witness in the trial of human rights activist and journalist Umida Niyazova, at which point he was reportedly shown copies of his bank statements and interrogated about the sources of his income.

¶3. (C) Yanyshев's colleague at Ferghana.ru, Aleksey Volosevich, told poloff on October 17 that he had spoken with Yanyshев, who described the attack in the same terms as the websites. Volosevich also said that he suffered a similar attack in 2005 when a group of five unknown persons forced him onto the ground and poured paint into his hair. He believed that both attacks were clearly aimed at intimidating the journalists into silence. In July, Volosevich and Said Abdurakhimov, a journalist for Uznews.net, were also detained and interrogated for several hours without explanation by Ministry of Defense and National Security Service officers in Uchkuduk and Navoi.

¶4. (C) Comment: The attack on Sid Yanyshев is another reminder that, despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and the press, independent journalists in Uzbekistan continue to face harassment and worse. We need to insist to the GOU that the new era of better relations that they say they want must include better performance across the board on human rights issues like freedom of the press.

NORLAND